

Roman Catholic Martyrs.

THE
LIFE AND MARTYRDOM

OF THE

MOST REV. DOCTOR OLIVER PLUNKET,

*Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh, and Primate
of Ireland,*

WHO WAS HANGED, DRAWN, AND QUARTERED.

*He suffered Martyrdom with constancy, on the 1st day of
July, 1681, in the Reign of King Charles the Second.*

COMPILED FROM A LATIN MANUSCRIPT, BY THE

Right Rev. Dr. Challoner,

Roman Catholic Bishop.

Thus, then, this Rev. Prelate hung betwixt heaven and earth, an open sacrifice to God for innocence and religion: as soon as he expired, the Executioner ripped up his belly and breast, and pulled out his heart and bowels, and threw them into the fire ready kindled near the gallows for that purpose.

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THIS apostolic man was descended of an illustrious family in the kingdom of Ireland; he was educated in the Catholic religion; and finding himself called to the ecclesiastical state, went abroad into Italy, and there spent almost twenty years at Rome, partly in studying, and partly in teaching divinity, where also he received the degree of Doctor in that faculty: and having acquired a general esteem by his virtue and learning, the See of Armagh falling vacant, he was chosen and consecrated to it, about the year 1669, and sent over to Ireland to govern the flock committed to his charge, which he did in such manner, as to give great edification to the Catholics, and to be much esteemed by the very Protestants: in proof of which we shall here put down what some Protestant Historians have written of him, upon occasion of his trial and condemnation.

And first, Dr. Burnet, who was never suspected of telling a lie in favour of a Papist, in his history of his own times, p. 502, acquaints us from the testimony of the Earl of Essex, that Plunket was a *wise and sober man*, who was for living quietly and in due submission to the government, without engaging in intrigues of state: and that he was condemned only upon the testimony of some lewd Priests, whom he had censured, and other evidence—brutal, profligate men, who found how good a trade swearing was in England, and thereupon came over and gave evidence of a plot also in Ireland. With Dr. Burnet, Mr. Eachard also agrees in his history of England, 3d vol. p. 631, where he tells us, that Mr. Plunket had an attestation of his good behaviour in Ireland, under the hands of the Earl of Essex and the Lord Berkley, when they were Lord Lieutenants of that kingdom. That the accusation against him looked very romantic, not to say malicious; yet the witnesses were so perfect and so positive in their oaths, that the jury found him guilty of high-treason, and sentence passed upon him accordingly. “That he has been assured by an unquestionable hand, that the Earl of Essex himself was so sensible of this poor man’s hardship, that he generously applied to the king for a pardon, and told his majesty the witnesses must needs be perjured; for these things sworn against him could not possibly be true. Upon which, the king in a passion said, *Why did you not attest this at his trial? It would have done him good then. I dare not pardon any one.* And so concluded with the same kind of answer he had given

another person formerly : *His blood be upon your head, and not upon mine.*"

But the continuator of Baker's Chronicle is still more particular in his account of this Catholic Prelate, p. 710. "In the mean time, (says he,) came on the trial of Dr. Oliver Plunket, a Popish Titular, Archbishop of Armagh, who called himself Primate of all Ireland. He was a worthy and good man, who, notwithstanding the high title given him, was in a very mean state of life, as having nothing to subsist on, but the contributions of a few poor Clergy of his own religion in the province of Ulster, who having but little themselves could not spare much to him. In these low circumstances he lived, though meanly, quietly and contentedly, meddling with nothing but the concerns of his function, and dissuading all about him from entering into any turbulent or factious intrigues. But while the Popish plot was warm, some lewd Irish Priests, and others of that nation, hearing that England was disposed to hearken to good swearers, thought themselves qualified for the employment. So they came over with an account of a plot in Ireland, and were well received by Lord Shaftsbury. They were also examined by the parliament, and what they said was believed. They were very profligate wretches, and some of the Priests among them had been censured by Plunket for their lewdness ; so partly out of revenge, and partly to keep themselves in business, they charged a plot upon that innocent, quiet man ; so that he was sent for over and brought to trial. The evidences swore, that upon his being made Primate of Ireland, he engaged to raise sixty or seventy thousand Irish, to be ready to join with the French to destroy the Protestant religion, and to get Dublin, Londonderry, and all the sea-ports into their hands ; and that besides the French army, there was a Spanish army to join with them, and that the Irish Clergy were to contribute to this design. Plunket in his defence alleged the improbability of all that was sworn against him ; which was apparent enough. He alleged that the Irish Clergy were so poor, that he himself, who was the head of a whole province, lived in a little thatched house, with only one servant, having never above sixty pounds a year income ; so that neither he nor they could be thought very likely to carry on a design of this nature. But the fact being positively sworn against him, and the jury unacquainted with the witnesses' characters, and the scene of action, he was brought in guilty and condemned. It is said that the Earl of Essex was so sensible of the injustice done him, &c. as above." So far this Protestant Historian.

But now let us hear what a Catholic, and one who was intimately acquainted with him in the last scene of his life, viz. the learned and truly religious father J. Corker, writes of him in a letter penned after his death. "I cannot as yet," says he, "pretend to give you (as you desire) a description of the virtues of the glorious Archbishop and Martyr, Dr. Oliver Plunket; I am promised the particulars of his life and actions, both at Rome, where he studied and taught almost twenty years; and in Ireland, where he exercised his episcopal or rather apostolical function, till he became a champion of faith: but these particulars are not as yet arrived at my hands. After his transportation hither, he was, as you know, close confined, and secluded from all conversation, save that of his keepers, until his arraignment: so that here also I am much in the dark, and can only inform you of what I learned, as it were by chance, from the mouths of the said keepers, viz. that he spent his time in almost continual prayer; that he fasted usually three or four days a week, with nothing but bread; that he appeared to them always modestly cheerful, without any anguish or concern at his danger, or strait confinement; that by his sweet and pious demeanor, he attracted an esteem and reverence from those few that came near him. When he was arraigned, it is true, I could write to him, and he to me: but our letters were read, transcribed and examined by the officers, before they were delivered to either of us. For which cause we had little other communication than what was necessary in order to his trial. But the trial being ended and he condemned, his man had leave to wait on him alone in his chamber, by whose means we had free intercourse by letters to each other. And now it was I clearly perceived the Spirit of God in him, and those lovely fruits of the Holy Ghost, charity, joy, peace, &c. transparent in his soul. And not only I, but many other Catholics, who came to receive his benediction, and were eye-witnesses (a favour not denied to us) can testify, there appeared in his words, in his actions, in his countenance, something so divinely elevated, such a composed mixture of cheerfulness, constancy, love, sweetness, and candour, as manifestly denoted the divine goodness had made him fit for a victim, and destined him for heaven. None saw or came near him, but received new comfort, new fervour, new desires to please, serve and suffer for Christ Jesus by his very presence. Concerning the manner and state of his prayer, he seemed most devoted to Catholic sentences taken out of Scripture, the divine office, and missal, which he made me procure for him three months

before he died: upon these sentences he let his soul dilate itself in love, following herein the sweet impulse and dictates of the Holy Ghost, and reading his prayers, writ rather in his heart, than in his book, according to that—*unctio ejus docet vos de omnibus*, St. John ii. 27. For this reason I suppose it was, that when with great humility he sent me his last speech to correct, he also writ me word, he would not at the place of execution make use of any other set form or method of prayer, than the *Pater noster*, *Ave Maria*, *Credo*, *Miserere*, *In manus tuas Domine*, &c. and for the rest, he would breathe forth his soul in such prayers and ejaculations as God Almighty should then inspire him withal. He continually endeavoured to improve and advance himself in the purity of divine love, and by consequence also in contrition for his sins past, of his deficiency in both, which this humble soul complained to me as the only thing that troubled him. This love had extinguished in him all fear of death, *perfecta charitas, foras mittit timorem*. A lover feareth not, but rejoiceth at the approach of the beloved. Hence the joy of our Holy Martyr seemed still to increase with his danger, and was fully accomplished by an assurance of death. The very night before he died, being now as it were at heart's ease, he went to bed at eleven o'clock, and slept quietly and soundly till four in the morning; at which time his man, who lay in the room with him, awaked him: so little concern had he upon his spirit, or rather so much had the loveliness of the end beautified the horror of the passage to it. After he certainly knew God Almighty had chosen him to the crown and dignity of martyrdom, he continually studied how to divest himself of himself, and become more and more an entire pleasing and perfect holocaust: to which end, as he gave up his soul with all its faculties to the conduct of God, so, for God's sake, he resigned the care and disposal of his body to unworthy me, &c. But I neither can nor dare undertake to describe unto you, the signal virtues of this blessed martyr. There appeared in him something beyond expression, something more than human: the most savage and hard-hearted people were mollified and attendered at his sight; many Protestants in my hearing wished their souls in the same state with his: all believed him innocent, and he made Catholics, even the most timorous, in love with death. When he was carried out of the press-yard to execution, he turned him about to our chamber windows, and with a pleasant aspect and elevated hands gave us his benediction. How he composed himself after he was taken from hence, you yourself can give a more

exact account than I, &c.” So far Father Corker, to whom the Holy Prelate applied himself for the affairs of his conscience whilst he was preparing for his exit, and who was consequently the best acquainted with his interior.

Archbishop Plunket was arraigned at the King’s Bench-bar, May the 3d, 1681, but not brought to his trial till the 8th of June. He had been then a year and a half in prison: he was found guilty by the Jury, upon the testimony of those perjured wretches that appeared against him; when he heard the verdict, he cried out, *Deo Gratias*, God be thanked. The Lord Chief Justice, before he pronounced sentence, wished him to renounce his false religion, as he called it, against which he most bitterly inveighed, as ten times worse than Paganism: but the prisoner knew better what his religion was than the Judge; and gave his Lordship to understand that he was not disposed to alter it upon any considerations. He added, “If I were a man that had no care of my conscience, I might have saved my life; for I was offered it by divers people here, if I would but confess my own guilt and accuse others: but, my Lord, I had rather die ten thousand deaths than wrongfully accuse any body. And the time will come when your Lordship will see what these witnesses are, that have come in against me. I do assure your Lordship, if I were a man that had not good principles, I might easily have saved my own life; but I had rather die ten thousand deaths, than wrongfully to take away one farthing of any man’s goods, one day of his liberty, or one minute of his life.” After he had said this, sentence was pronounced against him in the usual form, on the 15th of June.—After condemnation he writ the following letter to Father Corker:—

Dear Sir,

I am obliged to you for the favour and charity of the 20th, and for all your former benevolences: and whereas I cannot in this country remunerate you, with God’s grace I hope to be grateful in that kingdom, which is properly our country. And truly God gave me, (though unworthy of it,) that grace to have *fortem animum mortis terrore carentem*, “a courage fearless of death.” I have many sins to answer for before the supreme Judge of the High Bench, where no false witnesses can have audience. But as for the Bench yesterday, I am not guilty of any crime there objected to me: I would I could be so clear at the Bench of the All-powerful. *Ut ut sit*, there is one comfort, that he cannot be deceived, because he is omniscious,

and knows all secrets, even of hearts ; and cannot deceive, because all goodness ; so that I may be sure of a fair trial, and will get time sufficient to call witnesses ; nay, the Judge will bring them in a moment, if there will be need of any. You and your comrade's prayers will be powerful advocates at that Bench. Here none are admitted for

Your affectionate Friend,

OLIVER PLUNKET.

[Mr. Sheriff demanded his prisoner, who was carried by him on a sledge to be hanged, drawn and quartered. In his passage to the place of execution, he made many ejaculatory prayers, full of love of God and charity to his neighbours. When he arrived at Tyburn, and was tied up, before the cart was drawn from under him, he made, with wonderful cheerfulness, the following discourse.]

I have some few days past abided my trial at the King's Bench, and now very soon must hold up my hand at the King of King's Bench, and appear before a Judge who cannot be deceived by false witnesses, or corrupt allegations, for he knoweth the secrets of hearts. "Neither can he deceive any, or give any unjust sentence, or be misled by respect of persons, he being all goodness, and a most just Judge, will infallibly decree an eternal reward for all good works, and condign punishment for the smallest transgressions against his commandments." Which being a most certain and undoubted truth, it would be a wicked act, and contrary to my perpetual welfare, that I should now, by declaring anything contrary to the truth, commit a detestable sin, for which, within a very short time, I must receive sentence of everlasting damnation, after which there is no reprieve or hope of pardon. I will, therefore, confess the truth without any equivocation : and make use of the words according to their accustomed signification, assuring you moreover, that I am of that certain persuasion, that no power, not only upon earth, but also in heaven, can dispense with me, or give me leave to make a false protestation, and I protest upon the words of a dying man, as I hope for salvation at the hands of the supreme Judge, that I will declare the truth, with all candor and sincerity, and that my affairs may be the better known to all the world.

It is to be observed, that I have been accused in Ireland of treason premunire, and that there I was arraigned, and brought to my trial. But the prosecutors, (men of flagitious and infamous lives) perceiving that I had records and witnesses, they

voluntarily absented themselves, and came to this city, to procure that I should be brought hither to my trial, where the crimes objected were not committed, where the jury did not know me, or the qualities of my accusers, and were not informed of several other circumstances conducing to a fair trial. Here, after six months close imprisonment, (or thereabouts,) I was brought to the bar, the 3d of May, and arraigned for a crime, for which I was before arraigned in Ireland—a strange resolution—a rare fact—of which you will hardly find a precedent these 500 years past. But whereas my witnesses and records were in Ireland, the Lord Chief Justice gave me five weeks time to get them brought hither, but by reason of the uncertainty of the winds, the seas, and of the difficulty of getting copies of records, and bringing many witnesses from several counties in Ireland, and for many other impediments, (of which affidavit was made) I could not at the end of five weeks get the records and witnesses brought hither. I therefore begged for twelve days more, that I might be in readiness for my trial; which the Lord Chief Justice denied, and so I was brought to my trial: and exposed (as it were with my hands tied) to those merciless perjurers, who did aim at my life, by accusing me of these following crimes:—

First—That I have sent letters by one Neal O'Neal, who was my page, to Monsieur Baldeschi, the Pope's secretary, to the Bishop of Aix, and to Principe Colonna, that they might solicit foreign powers to invade Ireland: and also to have sent letters to Cardinal Bullion to the same effect.

Secondly—To have employed Captain Con O'Neal, to solicit the French King for succour.

Thirdly—To have levied and exacted monies from the Clergy of Ireland, to bring in the French, and to maintain 70,000 men.

Fourthly—To have had in readiness 70,000 men, and lists made of them; and to have given directions to one Friar Duffy to make a list of 250 men, in the parish of Foghart, in the county of Louth.

Fifthly—To have surrounded all the forts and harbours of Ireland, and to have fixed upon Carlingford as a fit harbour for the French landing.

Sixthly—To have had several councils and meetings, where there was money allotted for introducing the French.

Finally—That there was a meeting in the county of Monaghan, some ten or twelve years past, where there were 300 gentlemen of three several counties, to wit, Monaghan, Cavan,

and Armagh, whom I did exhort to take arms to recover their estates.

To the first I answer, that Neal O'Neal was never my servant or page, and that I never sent letter or letters by him to Monsieur Baldeschi, or the Bishop of Aix, or to Principe Colonna. And I say that the English translation of that pretended letter, produced by the Friar Mack-Moyar is a mere invention of his, and never penned by me, nor its original, either in English, Latin, Italian, or any other language. I affirm moreover, that I never wrote letter or letters to Cardinal Bullion, or to any of the French King's ministers; neither did any who was in that court either speak to me, or write to me, directly or indirectly, of any plot or conspiracy against the King or country. Farther I vow, that I never sent agent or agents to Rome, or to any other court, about any civil or temporal affairs, and it is well known (for it is a precept publicly printed) that clergymen, (living in countries where the government is not of Roman Catholics) are commanded by Rome, not to write to Rome concerning any civil or temporal affairs; and I do aver, that I never received letter or letters from the Pope, or from any other of his ministers, making the least mention of any such matters. So that Friars Mac Moyar and Duffy swore most falsely to such letter or letters, agent or agents.

To the second, I say, that I never employed Capt. Con O'Neal to the French King, or to any of his ministers, and that I never wrote to him or received letters from him, and that I never saw him but once, nor spoke to him to the best of my remembrance ten words; and for his being in Charlemont, or Dungannon, I never saw him in those towns, or knew of his being in those places; so that as to Con O'Neal, Friar Mac Moyar's depositions are false.

To the third, I say, that I never levied any money for a plot or conspiracy, for bringing in Spaniards or French; neither did I ever receive any upon that account, from Priests or Friars, as Mac Clane and Duffy most untruly asserted. I assure you I never received from any Clergyman in Ireland, but what was due to me by ancient custom for my maintenance, and what my predecessors these hundred years past were wont to receive; nay, I received less than many of them, and if all the Catholic clergy of Ireland get in one year, were put in one purse, it would signify little or nothing to introduce the French, or to raise an army of 70,000 men, which I had enlisted, as Friar Mac Moyar most falsely deposed. Neither is it less un-

true what Friar Duffy attested, viz. That I directed him to make a list of 250 men in the parish of Foghart, in the County of Louth.

To the fifth, I answer, that I never surrounded the forts and harbours of Ireland ; and that I never was at Cork, Kinsale, Bantry, Youghal, Dungarvan, Limerick, Dungannon, or Wexford ; as for Carlingford I was never in it but once, and stayed in it but half an hour ; neither did I consider the fort or haven ; neither had I it in my thoughts or imaginations to fix upon it, or upon any other fort or haven for landing of French or Spaniards ; and whilst I was at Carlingford, (by mere chance passing that way,) Friar Duffy was not in my company, as he most falsely swore.

To the sixth I say, that I was never at any meeting or council, where there was mention made of allotting or collecting money for a plot or conspiracy ; and it is well known, that the Catholic Clergy of Ireland, who have lands or revenues, and hardly are able to keep decent clothes on their backs, and life and soul together, cannot raise any considerable sum, nay cannot spare as much as would maintain half a regiment.

To the seventh, I answer, that I was never at any meeting of 300 gentlemen in the county of Monaghan, Armagh, and Cavan, nor of one county, nor of one barony, and that I never exhorted gentleman or gentlemen, either there, or any other part of Ireland, to take up arms for the recovering of their estates, and it is well known, that there are not even in the province of Ulster, three hundred Irish Roman Catholics who had estates, or lost estates by the late rebellion, and it is well known, all my thoughts and endeavours were for the quiet of my country, and especially of that province.

Now to be brief, as I hope for salvation, I never sent letter or letters, agent or agents, to Pope, King, Prince, or Prelate concerning any plot or conspiracy against any king or country ; I never raised sum or sums of money, great or small, to maintain soldier or soldiers, all the days of my life ; I never knew (or did it come into my imagination) that the French were to land at Carlingford, and I believe there is none who saw Ireland ever in a map, but will think it a mere romance ; I never knew of any plotters or conspirators in Ireland, but such as were notorious and proclaimed, (commonly called tories,) whom I did endeavour to suppress, and as I hope for salvation, I always have been, and am entirely innocent of the treason laid to my charge, and to any other whatsoever.

And though I be not guilty of the crimes of which I am

accused, yet I believe none ever came to this place who is in such a condition as I am, for if I should acknowledge (which in conscience I cannot do, because I should belie myself,) the chief crimes laid to my charge, no wise men that knows Ireland would believe me. If I should confess that I was able to raise 70,000 men in the districts of which I had care, to wit, in Ulster, nay even in all Ireland, and to have levied and exacted money from the R. C. Clergy for their maintenance, and to have prepared Carlingford for the landing of the French, all would laugh at me, it being well known that all the revenues of Ireland, both Spiritual and Temporal, possessed by his Catholic Majesty's subjects, are scarcely able to raise and maintain an army of 70,000 men. And if I deny all those crimes, (as I did, and do) yet it may be that some, who are not acquainted with the affairs of Ireland, will not believe that my denial is grounded upon truth, though I assert it with my last breath. I dare venture to affirm, that if these points of 70,000 men, &c. had been sworn to before any Protestant Jury in Ireland, and had been acknowledged by me at the Bar, they would not believe me, no more than if it had been deposed, and confessed by me, that I had flown in the air from Dublin to Holyhead.

You see therefore, to what a condition I am in, and you have heard what protestations I have made of my innocence, and I hope you will believe the words of a dying man. And that you may be the more induced to give me credit, I assure you that a great Peer sent me notice, "that he would save my life, if I would accuse others;" but I answered, "that I never knew any conspirators in Ireland, but such (as I said before) as were publicly known outlaws; and that to save my life, I would not falsely accuse any, nor prejudice my own soul. St. Matt. xvi. 26. *'What availeth a man if he gaineth the whole world and lose his own soul?'* To take away any man's life or goods wrongfully, ill becometh any Christian, especially a man of my calling, being a Clergyman of the Catholic Church, and also an unworthy Prelate, which I openly profess."

Neither will I deny to have exercised in Ireland, the functions of a Catholic Prelate, as long as there was any connivance or toleration; and by teaching and preaching, and statutes, to have endeavoured to bring the Clergy (of which I had care) to a due comportment, according to their calling: and though thereby I did my duty, yet some who would not amend, had a prejudice to me, and especially my accusers; to whom I did endeavour to do good: I mean the Clergymen, (as for the four laymen, who appeared against me, viz. Florence Mac Moyar,

the two Neals, and Hanson, I was never acquainted with them, but you see how I am requited, and how by false oaths they brought me to this untimely death. Which wicked act being a defect of persons, ought not to reflect upon the order of St. Francis, or upon the Roman Catholic Clergy; it being well known, that there was a Judas among the twelve Apostles, and a wicked man, called Nicholas, among the seven Deacons, and even as one of the said Deacons, to wit, holy Stephen, did pray for those who stoned him to death; so do I wish for those who with perjuries spill my innocent blood: saying, as St. Stephen did, "O Lord, lay not this sin to them." I do heartily forgive them, and also the Judges, who (by denying me sufficient time to bring my records and witnesses from Ireland,) did expose my life to evident danger.

I do also forgive all those who had any hand in bringing me from Ireland to be tried here; where it was morally impossible for me to have a fair trial. I do firmly forgive all who did concur, directly or indirectly, to take away my life, and I ask forgiveness of all those whom I ever offended, by thought, word, or deed. I beseech the All-powerful, that his Divine Majesty grant our King, Queen, and the Duke of York, and all the Royal Family, health, long life, and all prosperity in this world, and in the next everlasting felicity.

And now that I have shewed sufficiently (as I think) how innocent I am of any plot or conspiracy, I would I were able with the like truth to clear myself of high crimes committed against the Divine Majesty's commandments, (often transgressed by me) for which I am sorry with all my heart; and if I should or could live a thousand years, I have a firm resolution, and a strong purpose, by your grace, (O my God,) never to offend you, and I beseech your Divine Majesty, by the merits of Christ, and the intercession of his blessed Mother, and all the Holy Angels and Saints, to forgive me my sins, and to grant my soul eternal rest. Be merciful unto me, O Lord, &c. Spare my soul, &c. Into thy hand I recommend my spirit, &c.

Postscript—To the final satisfaction of all persons, that have the charity to believe the words of a dying man, I again declare before God, as I hope for salvation, that what is contained in this paper, is the plain and naked truth, without any equivocation, mental reservation, or secret evasion whatsoever; taking the words in the usual sense and meaning Protestants do, when they discourse with all candor and sincerity. To all which I have here subscribed my name,

OLIVER PLUNKET.

FINIS.